3: Thompson E-5 (1933-1934) 1940 OQ6 Lau OQ6
Kambara

dark stormy night when, having sailed by canoe from Mothe to the horseshoe-shaped island of Fulanga, we were trying to find Naivindamu village on the shore of the central lagoon. As we sailed blindly about in wind and rain we barely missed one of the mushroom-shaped coral islets which dot the lagoon. One of the three sailors regularly blew a conch shell, the Lauan signal of distress, but there was no response. He had a slight hope that the natives, upon hearing it, would build a signal fire, he said. Finally he cried: *"Rarama!"* (light). After some minutes I discerned a faint glow ahead, which the boys said was from one of the village kitchen fires. It grew brighter as we approached. In a few minutes the canoe was beached and we were surrounded by faces peering through the darkness and by cries of *"Papalangi!"* (the native word for foreigner or European). They had heard the conch blasts, they said, but the night was too wet and stormy to leave their kitchen fires.

The typical response to treatment by modern medicine also reflects the native psychological set. Upon request I once treated a young Tokalau girl who had received a deep leg wound from a large fish. After the girl had recovered, her father came to me frequently with requests for tobacco, kava, etc. According to native ideology, I owed him a debt for having been allowed to cure the girl, because he could not conceive of my treating her if I had not believed it was somehow to my advantage.

In order to understand the native outlook on life today let us review briefly what is known of the old Lauan religion. Before the introduction of Christianity, the most important superhuman beings in Lau were the ancestor gods, probably introduced into Lau by the Polynesian immigrants who came from Viti Levu. The most powerful ancestors of noble clans were eventually deified after death. When the missionaries landed in Lau the ancestor cult was not only the key to the native religion but also the basis of the social and economic life.

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174 is supported by many small hints. And if from Malaya why not from farther west still—from the peoples of western Asia, the "cradle of the human race"?

142 The Polynesian has a distinctly "Eastern" face, high cheek bones, and slightly slanting eyes; and his manners and customs are very much 157 of "the east." He is clever, but childlike; easily stirred to passion, yet dreamy; full of vanity and arrogant pride, yet of very courtly and charming manners; careless of his own life, yet callous to the sufferings of others. Certain little actions of his continually crop up that, like the flashing of a camera shutter, give you a momentary glimpse of some mysterious past, of some ancestry which is surely "Eastern."

●201 171 A Lau islander—who is mostly a Polynesian (and even a Fijian, who is, as I have mentioned above, half a Polynesian)—beckons to you, not as a European would with an upward crooked finger or hand, but exactly as the Malayans do, with a downward sweep of the hand, as it were "hooking" you towards him. Again, a Lau islander makes a sign of assent by tilting up his chin, exactly as the people of Malay do. And a Lau islander claps his hands softly once or twice as a mark of respect for a chief, and as far north as old Japan the same sign was used; [576] while the wooden head-rest and the reed houses

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with woven mat-flooring might with few differences be found in parts of Malay to-day. The out-rigger canoe may seem fairly obvious, yet it was not used among western nations. Mariner, in his immortal book on Tonga, mentioned the veiling of women at a very ancient marriage ceremony which he witnessed there in the early days of the nineteenth century; and there are scores of little things like this that the Polynesian must have unconsciously retained despite his centuries of wandering and separation from his ancestral home. The language question is significant in itself; modes of thought and expression are very much the same, and there are more than a few root words to be found that are purely Malayan.

But enough of such theories, fascinating as they may be to the casual observer. Such things may safely be left in the hands of professional ethnologists. I have merely endeavoured to set down in this book some of the old legends and fairy stories of a people whom, with all their faults, I dearly love, and among whom I have lived and carried on my work for nearly ten years as Commissioner of their District. I take no credit for these tales, which are exactly as told to me by the natives themselves, and are selected from a big book of notes that I have made at odd times during my long residence amongst them. The apparently "biblical" language is

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"'What is this, Tui Liku,' said he; 'why are you thus sleepy, and why do you look so sad?' 539* 776

"'It is because of the demons of this place, my lord,' said Tui Liku; and he told him what had befallen him. Whereat Ligadua was very angry, and he stepped across to his house (you may see the foundation of it to this day, a *yavu tameri* (a marvellous one indeed), and fit truly for a god. Now, outside his house lies the great Drum named *Sagasagawalé* (all-our-work-for-nothing), about the theft of which from Matokano by the god I will tell you some other day. He rang hard and loud on *Sagasagawalé*, and all the demons of Tuvana came running up at once and sat down in a circle before him. Then Ligadua spoke to them, and was very angry with them, and reproved them, and warned them never to touch Tui Liku again. They hung their heads [201] in silence, and plucked at the grass[1] near them, and were ashamed. Then Ligadua told them to go; and he called up Tui Liku and told him he might use his big house, and that he might wait there for a canoe from Matokano without further fear of the demons. 'As for me,' he said, 'I now go back to Burotu.'

"Then Tui Liku summoned up his courage and asked to be allowed to see Burotu.

"'If I take your spirit with me it may not be

[1] A Lauan method of showing shame.

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123 115 being one of the most common, as the Polynesian [673] Lauan—true to type—is by nature more light-fingered than his semi-Papuan brother of Fiji.

[516 576] I asked the man what he saw; and, seating himself cross-legged in the attitude of respect, he politely answered, "It is nothing, sir, I was but thinking of Filipi, a man formerly of my town."

"And what about Filipi? What did he do?" I inquired.

"He is dead," he answered, looking down at the deck.

*539 754 Knowing from the man's attitude that there was something behind all this I asked him freely to tell me all. No one enjoys "spinning a yarn" more than a South Sea islander when he really gets started, and many interesting old legends, and, incidentally, helpful facts in my work, have I picked up in this way on some of my lengthy sea-journeys about the group.

"It was this way, sir," he began. "It was said that *dua na vakadraudrau ca* (some evil magic) was performed at that place there," ● [201] pointing with his chin—the same gesture his Malayan ancestors had used thousands of years before—at the little bay we were passing. "I know nothing of it myself," he hastily added. "It is only what I have heard, and it happened years ago, just before you, sir, first came to Lau. Now, Filipi and a man of Nayau Island were doing

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174 177 695 *Yalovaki* was brought from Samoa by a tribe now living on Lakeba Island, called the Leamaki; and "Tui Leamaki" is a hereditary title used to this day by the head of that tribe. But it is purely a Polynesian custom, and was probably used by the Lauans in their previous country, before they came "from the East"; though it may have been resuscitated by the Leamaki people.

695 The procedure was for a suspected person to be brought into the centre of a ring composed of a council of chiefs, when the professor of *Yalovaki* seated himself on the mat opposite "the defendant," and solemnly said to him, "Did you in very truth do this thing or not? If you lie concerning the matter, so will your soul be captured this day." He then took a filmy scarf of finest *tappa*, and, immediately the answer was given, he twirled it over the man's head, as the Polynesians throw a cast-net, and if the man had lied, his soul was believed to be snared within it. Which belief, if the man really *had* lied, so weighed on his mind that he often went mad.

177 627 [797] [201] [754] Now comes the modern equivalent of the practice. The missionaries rightly stopped the *Yalovaki*, so the people felt bound to provide some sort of substitute. They saw in the earliest law courts the foreign method of "kissing the book," which caught their fancy immensely; so to this day

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when there is an undetected crime, but especially when a man falls ill and declares that he must have been *vakadraudrau'd*, a secret meeting of the people is held, and all are more or less compelled to go through the *Yalovaki* practice, only *Regui Vola* ("smelling the Bible"—Polynesians do not kiss with their lips, they sniff with their nostrils) is used. This *compulsory* ordeal is not, of course, a thing to be approved of, and is not allowed, though only last year the *Roko* (native governor) of the Lau Islands wanted my permission to use it to detect witchcraft!

Various coincidences have much served to strengthen the people's belief in the efficacy of *Regui Vola*, especially the famous case of Emili (the sister of Luki, the great chief of Matuku Island), which, though it happened twenty years ago, is still talked about to this day. She was strongly suspected of having *vakadraudrau'd* to death her own brother; and on the day of his death she was made to *Regui Vola* by the native missionary in the presence of all the people, and she swore on oath that she might die if she had done this deed. She was then a young woman in perfect health. That afternoon she died!

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123 not well be refused, and might mean the cementing
574 of an alliance, or the request for a wife, or the
431 sacking of a rival town. Nowadays the presentation of them is purely a matter of ceremony. This part of the performance was called the *Qalovi*, and should properly have taken place while we were still on the water, the islanders swimming out to us carrying the *tabua*, but this is now seldom done.] Our *matapuli* took them up in token of acceptance and gazed at them for a moment in deep admiration, as etiquette demanded, and then made another short set speech, repeating his (or, rather, our) wishes that all should be well with the land.

After this two men staggered in bearing an enormous multi-branching root of green *Yaqona*[1] which they placed at our feet. Our *matapuli* [201] here did the *vaka cobo*, or clapping of the hollowed hands cross-ways, as is always done where *Yaqona* 123 is concerned, and told the men to prepare a bowl 574 of the drink from it.

273 At this point the torches were extinguished, lanterns suspended from the trees, and the parallel lines of men automatically grouped themselves in a half-circle facing us, while an enormous round polished bowl, made of a single section of the *Vesi* tree, and decorated with hanging clusters

[1] Known as Kava or Hava in other parts of the Pacific; and with the drinking of which all important ceremonies must inevitably be connected.

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123 hardly know the meaning of. After a little while,
574 the mixture having attained a sufficiently fluid
292 state, the old leader of the *méké* called out "*Livi wai se?*" (Shall water continue to be poured or not?); but, apparently, no answer was expected, this being a set phrase signifying that there was enough. *Mai lose* (the wringer), then took up his duties with a thick hank of lace-like, but strong, *vau* bark fibres; and, sweeping the liquid with circular movements, gathered up in the meshwork the solid particles of *Yaqona*, leaving the turbid brown fluid comparatively clear. This sweeping process was gone through many times, the *vau* being wrung out until the last drop of fluid had been expressed from it, and the fibres twisted until the muscles of the man's arms looked ready to crack, the dry residue being shaken out over a mat at the side. When at last even this expert was satisfied he called out, "It is clear," and our *matapuli* responded, "*Tu mai*,"[1] at which two young men, decorated
[301] with coloured leaves round their arms and legs,
H15 started to carry round the drink in polished half-coco-nut shells.

The *Talai* drank his off and then sent back the empty cup along the mats in a spinning fashion, as is the custom, and I did the same;
● [201] deep-toned words of "*Maca, ah, maca*,"[2] fol-

[1] "Let them arise and approach."
[2] "It is empty" (he has drunk).

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lowed by a measured clapping of hands, greeting this action.

So also when any of the other higher chiefs subsequently drank, the same *maca* and hand clapping followed. The order of precedence was very strictly observed, and he who had poured the water called out, with a peculiar wailing cry, as each cup was filled, "*Kava kuo heka*,"[1] at which the *matapuli* called out the name of some one present. That individual thereupon clapped his hands once, to draw the attention of the cup-bearer to him, and the cup was presented. In Lau they have now adopted the Fijian order of precedence, and the biggest chief takes the first drink. But in Tonga the chief drinks third, his *matapuli* and one other drinking before him, possibly to safeguard against poison.

[201]

And so ended this very impressive ceremony, a relic of Lau in the olden days, and but seldom performed now. And never before or since, in the many years I have spent in the Lau Islands, have I seen it performed among the fantastic shadows and flickering lights from a living lane of torch-bearers.

[1] Literally, "The Kava is lifted"; in other words, "Who is to have this?"

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776 825 called the 'Meré,' met a sudden storm in Somo Somo Straits, and sprang a leak and sank, leaving Ratu Toro and all his men to swim to the distant shore.

"And when they were about half-way a great shark rose to the surface and looked at them, and then swam slowly round them, smelling at each as he passed; and they knew no fear, for were they not Dakuwaqa's men and recognized by him? But there was a Tongan sailor with them and him they placed in their midst, for had Dakuwaqa seen him, short indeed would have been his life. And so they made safely to shore and all were unscathed; and the Tongan, climbing up on to the reef, cried out, mockingly, '*Sa lako, Bokola,*'—and *Bokola,*[1] as you know, sir, is but an ill name to call anyone, and not at all a word to use to a god. And the Tongan escaped on that day; but months afterwards word came from far-off Tonga that he had been taken by a shark while out fishing one day—for Dakuwaqa never forgets—and the fear of Dakuwaqa thus became greater than ever.

262 825 776 "These, sir, are but idle tales," added the old lady, with a would-be scornful shrug of her shoulders, meant to impress on me her utter [201] disbelief in such things. "You know, of course,

[1] Literally, the corpse of an enemy prepared for a cannibal feast; and the greatest insult in the language.